

Chapter 2

Vision of Water Management in the Clark Fork River Basin

Management of water in the Clark Fork River Basin should be based first on understanding the water resource and the factors that affect its use, second on developing a management system based on this understanding, and finally on operating the system to achieve specific goals.

In particular, it is necessary to understand:

- The physical availability of surface and groundwater;
- The legal availability of water;
- Existing water uses;
- Emerging needs and interests;
- The impact of land and natural resource use on water availability; and
- Information needed to improve water management.

The water management system consisting of individual water users, private organizations, and government agencies should:

- Reflect the unique needs and interests of individual sub-basins within the context of the basin as a whole;
- Build on and integrate existing systems for water rights, land-use planning, the permitting of sanitation systems, and so on;
- Recognize the inter-relationships of existing management practices, such as the timing of diversions and return flows and surface-groundwater interactions;
- Monitor and evaluate the water management system on an ongoing basis; and
- Create a method for continuing to learn more about the water management system and adapting water management strategies based on new information and understanding.

The water management system should then be operated to:

- Recognize and protect existing rights;
- Manage for multiple uses;
- Cooperate during shortages;
- Continue water education; and
- Protect, conserve, and sustain the water resource.

The vision of understanding the water resource, developing a water management system, and operating the system to achieve the specific goals will guide how this plan answers the three statutory mandates: developing options or strategies to protect the security of water rights and providing for the orderly development and conservation of water.